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PAPERS READ

BEFORE THE

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

I.—*Excursion up the River of Cameroons and to the Bay of Amboises.* By Captain W. ALLEN, R.N.

IN the months of May and June, 1842, while waiting, with H.M. steam-vessels Wilberforce and Soudan, under my command, for orders from England respecting the future movements of the Niger Expedition, I took advantage of the delay to examine some parts of the coast of Africa situated near Fernando Po, which had been alluded to in the instructions from my Lords of the Admiralty.

I directed my attention first to the large estuary called by the Portuguese Cameroons. It had been partly surveyed by Captain Vidal; but some large rivers, which were supposed to discharge their waters into it—in particular the Malimba—remained unexplored. These I hoped to be able to examine in such a manner, at least, as would lead to a knowledge of their magnitude and importance.

By carefully feeling our way with the lead, we arrived safely at the anchorage of the palm-oil ships, in one of the rivers which has retained the name of the Cameroons. Here a considerable trade has been carried on for many years with a tribe of the natives who have settled on the lowest *diluvial* part of the left bank of the river, where, by their activity in collecting palm-oil, and their intercourse with Europeans, they have become a very large and important community, possessing such a degree of civilization as to render them, in my opinion, highly interesting, and to prepare them for becoming a connecting link between the civilized European and the less advanced natives of the interior.

These native settlers are at present subject to two chiefs, or principal traders, who have assumed a regal style and title. The towns of *King Bell* and *King Aqua*, separated only by a little brook, are of great extent inland. The houses are neatly built of bamboo, in wide and regular streets; but the number of plantain and cocoa-nut trees, and even of large fields of maize interspersed

among the houses, render it impossible to form an estimate of the size and population of the towns. I had no time to walk over them; and no credit can be attached to the extravagant estimates of the natives. They are indeed an assemblage of villages, or *towns*, as they call them; each named after the head of a family, who selects a spot of ground, and adds to his town in proportion as he increases the number of his wives and slaves. The settlements are situated on a plain, which, being elevated 50 feet above the level of the river, and being of a sandy nature, may be considered as comparatively healthy—an inference corroborated by the appearance of the natives, and the accounts of Mr. Lilley, agent to Messrs. Hamilton and Jackson, who has resided there nearly ten years.

Notwithstanding the constant intercourse kept up with the tribes of the interior—who bring down palm-oil in their canoes—the nature and even the names of the rivers which furnish the means of transport for this valuable article have hitherto remained unknown. I endeavoured to obtain information from the chiefs, and most intelligent men, but found their accounts so vague and unsatisfactory, that I resolved on penetrating as far as I could, without risking—what was of paramount importance—the health of my crew.

I first attempted to gain the main branch of the river in the Wilberforce; and with the assistance of Mr. Lilley—of King Bell—and of a good pilot, I proceeded up the Jibareh creek, which was said by the pilot Glasgow to be—though a circuitous route—the safest channel to the main river. I, however, found that it was not deep enough to warrant my going more than 7 or 8 miles from the anchorage; but before I turned back I explored another creek, the Bòmano, as far as it could be done with safety. This creek had diminished very much at the highest point I reached, both in breadth and depth; and Glasgow said it terminates at about $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile further on towards the mountains. It doubtless receives some of the drainage of the eastern portion of the range of mountains, behind the lofty Cameroons, or Mongo ma Lobah, which we could see a-head.

Having failed in the attempt to penetrate by these creeks, I tried the direct channel, which lies close to the actual left bank of the river; but found it so narrow and shallow that, considering the fearful consequences of being left aground at the spring-tide, I was obliged to abandon the idea of passing—in the steam-vessel—the Mangrove islands, which conceal the true nature of the river, and therefore resolved on trying what could be done by a short excursion in a boat. A fine forty-foot galley, which had been intended for a trip to Bussah on the Niger, was hastily fitted with double awnings, a swivel in the bow, small arms, and several

days' provisions, and with a crew of nine black men under my faithful head Kruman, Jack Smoke, who was so unwearied in his attentions to me during sickness on my first voyage up the Niger. I took with me also Lieutenant Sidney, surveying officer, Mr. Terry, chief clerk to the Commissioners, and Mr. Sterling, assistant surgeon. Mr. Lilley, agent to Messrs. Hamilton and Jackson, kindly volunteered to accompany me, and from his connexions, and knowledge of the customs of the natives, he was of the greatest service. I also engaged King Bell and Prince Beppo with their canoes of about thirty-five paddles each.

We started soon after noon on the 7th of May, 1842, with the flood-tide, beautiful weather, and an agreeable temperature. Old Glasgow, an intelligent pilot, who could speak good English, was at the helm, and, soon after leaving the vessel, we entered the narrow and direct channel on the left bank. King Bell took the lead, but was soon out of sight, as with our heavily laden boat and few paddles we could not keep pace with him. We soon found ourselves involved in a labyrinth of creeks, formed by numerous mud islands thickly overgrown with mangroves. Glasgow, however, appeared to know his way quite well, and he attended to my instructions to follow the windings of the channel, which frequently led us close to the bushes; a leadsman in the bow of the boat continually called out the soundings, and Mr. Sidney laid down the course of the river as we proceeded. In these parts we had in some places 10 feet water, but suddenly shoaling to 2 or 3 as we approached the skirts of the numerous sand-banks, which at this season sometimes stretched nearly across the river, leaving but a narrow passage—even for a boat—under the overhanging boughs of the trees.

The aspect of these islands excited anything but pleasurable emotions; for the decayed vegetable matter with which they were covered, and the slimy roots of the mangrove, emitted a highly offensive odour, and our progress was in frequent danger of interruption by the trunks and branches of fallen trees.

After an hour's paddling we got clear of the islets, and came upon a sheet of water about 2000 yards wide, from which we could see the vessels at anchor off Bell's Town, about 5 miles distant. We soon afterwards entered another narrow channel, between two islands, which were, however, of much more agreeable aspect: the mangroves disappeared at the upper end, where the pilot said the tide ceases. By this expression he only meant that the water ceases to be salt—a circumstance indicated by the change in the character of the vegetation. The swelling of the tide is felt at the farthest point which we reached in this little voyage.

The first trees, as on the Lower Niger, were low palms, with

immense arching leaves or branches (called erroneously bamboo), from which the natives extract the best palm wine, called Nimba. The long ribs of their branches are used for the roofs of huts. With these are intermixed ferns, the pandanus, and a variety of bushes and shrubs of small growth. The foliage appeared of a healthier hue; the banks, though still low, were firm; and the richness of the vegetable kingdom increased rapidly as we advanced, especially when on leaving the narrow channel before mentioned and passing the upper end of the Jibareh creek, we attained the principal object of our little voyage—the main undivided river—a broad and magnificent stream resembling some of the reaches of the Niger below Abòh, and about 400 or 500 yards wide. The banks at the margin of the water were thickly covered with the long grass peculiar to African rivers; immediately behind came ferns, patches of plantains, and bushes of endless variety of form and foliage; many in full flower, and nearly all thickly matted with innumerable graceful creepers. Behind these rise the slender palm, the cocoa-nut, and the gigantic bombax, the strength of whose buttresses enables it to defy the rage of the tornado, and to afford shelter and protection to the numerous forest trees that group around it.

This part of the river was said to be a favourite haunt of hippopotami and alligators, though we had not an opportunity of seeing any. The afternoon was very fine, and the breeze from the sea refreshing, the temperature of the air was 84°, and that of the water 83°; the declining sun added a tone of gaiety to the scenery. Some distance ahead, and discernible only by his British red ensign and the sparkling of the dripping paddles, King Bell's canoe glided rapidly along the left bank, his men keeping tune to the wild notes of his singing boy, which were returned distinctly by the echo of the opposite bank. Far behind us, in the long reach, came the canoe of *Prince Beppo*, also decked with a gay flag—whilst frequently on either side of us little barques, containing each but one crouching native, darted across the stream or along the dark banks, seeking shelter among the long grass, alarmed at the novel appearance of white men in these hitherto unexplored waters. Soon large huts were seen on the banks, the property of domestic slaves belonging to Bell or Aqua. There were spacious clearings around the huts, cultivated with bananas, plantains, cocoa, &c., all denoting plenty; and the cleanliness of the houses and the platforms in front far surpassed the miserable hovels of the lean and dirty "gentlemen" on the lower parts of the Niger. As we advanced, villages became numerous, and all had a comfortable appearance, being built in the neat style of the Cameroons towns. As most of the principal natives were in the habit of trading with the ships, they

frequently recognised Mr. Lilley, and the inquiries they made dispelled the idea that we were going among an uncivilized people.

At 3 miles from the apex of the Delta we passed a tributary stream: Glasgow said it was navigable to a place called Abo, which we could reach by sunset. Near this, on the left bank, a farm belonging to one of Aqua's domestic slaves, Takoh Makumboh, struck us as being in a very favourable situation, for the bank is high, and the soil, though light, is apparently good: the neatness of the huts and the cultivation were remarkable. The opposite, or right bank, also became gradually more elevated.

About 3 miles further we arrived at what is called the shallow-part of the river: it was then a broad sheet of water (600 yards), though it just covers the sandbanks. However, in two moons, according to Glasgow's account, there would be plenty of water. He pointed to some grass at least 15 feet high, on the right bank, over which he said the canoes paddled with ease. At that time a great portion of the low lands must be under water. A little above this the river becomes much narrower, not being more than 350 yards, with a depth, though rarely, of 18 or 20 feet. The stream is in fact divided by the Wuri Island, which is also the commencement of the country of that name, in which a different dialect is spoken from that which is used by the Cameroons or Dualla nation lower down. The Wuri country is celebrated for its yams, which are taken down the river for sale. As evening was drawing on, and the current was strong against us, we made the best of our way to reach the town belonging to a friend of Mr. Lilley, where he proposed we should sleep. The news of our approach had been spread by King Bell and his men, who frequently stopped at the farms and villages, so that the banks were thronged with natives, who saluted us as we passed with deafening shouts, screams, and laughter; the women of course evincing the greatest surprise and delight at the novelty of our appearance.

With the exception of some little eminences of a friable sort of sandstone, the country appeared to be level. When the low lands are overflowed, the inhabitants are obliged to retreat to these higher grounds, which they reach in their canoes, paddling over their former plantations. They prepare for this periodical emergency by laying in a stock of smoked fish, and yams cut in slices and baked, which form a convenient provision for travelling. Thus provided, they live in temporary huts till the waters subside, and allow them to return to their former residences, to plant and reap till the next season.

At 5 P.M. we arrived at Bona-pia, the landing-place or wharf of a town called Andámako. Here we found King Bell and Beppo

waiting for us, having made up their minds not to go any further ; and they used every argument to prevail on me to pass the night there, in which the chief of the town joined, with a very cordial invitation. I was, however, anxious to profit by the remaining daylight to reach the next town, as it would shorten our work for the following day. After a sufficient explanation, which was not, however, heard amidst the noise and squabbling, I pushed on to the town of Wana Makembi, which we reached at dark, but found that the chief—Mr. Lilley's friend—having been, it appears, summoned to a palaver at a town higher up the river, was absent, and that his people dared not entertain us in his absence. Bell was unwilling to land under these circumstances, as he said he could not be received in a manner becoming his dignity. We found him, however, enjoying the hospitality of the inferior people by drinking deeply of their palm wine. The sight of the miserable huts which we saw from the boat close to the muddy bank, and the attacks of myriads of mosquitoes and sand-flies, made me think better of Bell's advice, and regret not having accepted the invitation of the chief of Andámako. We knew not how we might fare if we tried for a lodging further up the river. My men were tired, having pulled without resting ; and I was unwilling, by pushing them too hard on the first day, to weaken them for the second. King Bell, however, settled the matter by assuring me that there was no town, within two hours' pull, able to afford us decent accommodation. We therefore turned back, and glided rapidly down with the current, to Bona-pia, where we were received by King Bell and his friends, amid a storm of unintelligible welcome.

After the long confinement in a cramped position in the boat, we were glad to land ; and having provided ourselves with such necessaries from our stores as might conduce in some degree to our comfort, where so little was to be expected, we began our march along a well-beaten path, at first abruptly rising from the bank of the river, and afterwards preserving a gradual ascent for about half a mile. The dew fell heavily ; but, fatigued as we were, we could not but enjoy the gratification of stretching our limbs on terra firma. Overhead flitted numerous fire-flies, and every bush was illuminated by their brilliant coruscations. A few straggling roots across the path, which caused us now and then to stumble, were the only obstacles to our progress ; and an easy walk of less than half an hour brought us to the residence of the chief or "gentleman" of Andámako.

An immense concourse of people awaited our arrival, and no sooner had we reached our destination than we found ourselves enclosed in a dense mass of men, women, and children. Even the branches of the old tree in the middle of the street and in

front of the chief's house, were loaded with dark urchins; yet, notwithstanding the novelty of the sight of Europeans in this inland African village, no annoying act nor insulting jest was indulged in at our expense.

When the ceremonial for our reception was prepared, the crowd gave way, and the chief—a powerful old man, whose grey *wool* 'told of many a scorching summer's sun'—came forward and conducted us to seats in front of his own door; a chair was placed for me in the middle, Mr. Lilley was provided with a stool on one side of me, and King Bell with one on the other; the rest of our party accommodated themselves very well on a long piece of timber at the head of the sable warriors forming our escort. By this arrangement we had the advantage of keeping the crowd in front and at a more convenient distance. The red glare of a lamp of palm-oil, fixed to the mud-wall behind us, played upon the moving mass of dark beings, making the deep shades of night still deeper in the background; and producing, by the lurid glow it shed on all in its immediate neighbourhood, a picture of the most unique description.

After waiting a considerable time—during which the good-natured people endeavoured to amuse us by playing tricks with a poor idiot—a substantial supper was served up on a long chest, the utility of which is undeniable, as, according to custom, after having had the custody of its owner's riches during his life, it is destined to be the depositary of his mortal remains, when obliged, by the universal enemy, to relinquish his "grip on this world's gear." Whether this individual coffer had as yet figured in the capacity either of a treasury or a coffin, I do not know, but it served us equally well as a table. The supper was composed chiefly of stews of goat, mutton, fowls, plantains, yams, &c., some with palm-oil and some without, at my express desire; though I confess that the fresh pure oil—which is a constant ingredient in native cookery—is much more palatable than I had imagined; and it is said to be extremely wholesome. King Bell, though he took a glass of grog to keep us company, refused to sup until we had finished, out of compliment to white men; but when he began he rapidly made up for lost time, by a well directed attack on an ample calabash of stew, prepared for his especial appetite. In appeasing his hunger, however, he showed himself mindful of the wants of his watchful attendants, by pitching to them, ever and anon, a bone, or a morsel of meat, with his own royal hand. There was no unseemly scrambling for his majesty's favour, every one appeared to know for whom the mouthful was intended, by the direction it took in its flight over their heads.

Supper being ended, every thing was cleared away, and the

coffin was well garnished with *spirits*; and, although we all felt weary and sleepy, we were obliged to submit to some potations and a long palaver on the subject of our visit in the river, and to listen patiently to the evidently much mutilated translation of the eloquence and lengthy arguments of the noisy council. At last, after an hour's hard battle—in words—between King Bell, the gentleman of the town, and one or two of the most notable wise-heads, it was resolved that a fetiche should determine whether it was proper that I should continue my voyage up the river or return by the way I had come, leaving my wishes entirely out of the question. The ceremony—over which I had no control to prevent or modify—having been duly performed, it appeared to be decided, without appeal, that my expedition was at an end. I modestly ventured to express an opposite determination, but, as I thought it the wiser course not to waste the precious hours of sleep in useless disputes, I deferred till the morrow should enable me to execute my purpose in despite of the fetiche. In the meantime, in order to divert their attention and cut short their arguments, I ordered a rocket to be fired, which had the desired effect of bewildering them between admiration and fear. After strolling up and down the clean street for some time to obtain a little fresh air, I turned into the chief's own hut, which had been vacated in my favour. Other huts were prepared for Mr. Lilley, Mr. Terry, and Mr. Sterling, though the two latter preferred sleeping in the tree. My hut was large and *apparently* clean, but it was in vain I tried to sleep, for the continual noise of the lingering gossips outside, the scampering of the rats overhead and all around me, the buzzing and tickling of myriads of sand-flies—though there were no mosquitoes—and the many salient points in the bamboo frame which,—covered by a mat,—formed my couch; all these were sufficient inducements for me to lie awake, and long for the morning, to enable me to renew my voyage. When daylight at length arrived I proposed to Bell to start before the sun should attain power; but he declared that his people could not pull without breakfast, and the preparation of this meal was delayed by a variety of untoward circumstances; among which, not the least important was the perversity of the devoted goat, who required to be caught three or four times before he would allow himself to be killed, skinned, and stewed; so that by the time this very important affair was dispatched, and we had taken leave of our kind host, it was 9 o'clock.

On our way down to the boat we were met by a great number of men armed with muskets, who saluted me very civilly in passing; but previous to our embarkation they surrounded Mr. Lilley and King Bell, and engaged them in an animated discussion on the subject of our further advance. At times the palaver seemed

to go on smoothly enough, at others the interlocutors broke out into passionate exclamation and the wildest gestures, which, being simultaneous on the part of the natives, showed them to be unanimous in their unseasonable stipulations. My fears for Mr. Lilley's safety were allayed by his perfectly composed demeanour, as he stood in the centre of this apparently angry group. When he came into the boat he explained, that these people had come from the towns above to inform me that, if we proceeded on our voyage, we should meet with a very bad and savage set of men, from whom our lives would be in the greatest danger. The orator added, that since the white men had come to their country they considered their honour pledged for our safety, and therefore they could not suffer us to expose ourselves to such peril; but that if we were obstinate, and would not take the warning of our best and warmest friends, they would be reduced to the disagreeable necessity of shooting us themselves, in order to save us and them from the disgrace and mortification of being killed by bushmen.

I knew the sum and substance of all this to be that they were jealous of our becoming acquainted with the river; and feared if they allowed us to penetrate beyond their territories, that their neighbours would participate in the advantages of intercourse with the white men. It was evident that if they were fully bent on carrying their *merciful* intentions into effect, I had not sufficient means to justify my obstinacy. However I thought it better to treat the affair in a cavalier manner, so I laughed at their fears for our safety, and said that my present intention was only to go as far as the upper end of Wuri Island, which I was resolved to do, but that I might possibly return with the *fire-ship*, and then I would see who would dare to stop a white man and the Queen of England's ship. The men on the bank then gave three loud shouts, whether in acquiescence, or defiance, I did not know; but they suffered us to proceed unmolested. The men on the bank of Wuri Island participated in the anxiety about our intentions, and all asked if we were going to the Budiman's country. Some seemed satisfied with our answer, others endeavoured to stop us by remonstrances and angry gesticulation. I was much amused by the nonchalance of our pilot Glasgow, who steered us steadily on our course, without condescending to repeat his answers.

Wuri island is about $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length by about 3 wide. It is beautifully wooded with a great variety of trees, among which the magnificent bombax stands the monarch of them all. The banks are steep and high on the immediate border of the river, but the ground within is very low and swampy. This enables the natives to catch fish in a very simple manner, by cutting wide trenches through the bank, so that when the water rises in the

river it flows by these channels to the low ground behind, forming large basins, into which great quantities of fish find their way, and are retained by means of sluices. When the river falls the water is let off again, a net having been previously placed across the aperture, by which means the exit of the fish is effectually prevented. Another method of fishing is practised on this river, as well as on the lower Niger. A large wicker enclosure is formed closed to the bank, having a sliding door at the outer side, and a bait within. A person watches from a stage or little hut built close to the basket or enclosure, and when he sees that a fish has entered and is fairly engaged with the bait he lets fall the sliding door and prevents the retreat of his victim.

The island appeared to be very thickly peopled, but only on the banks. The huts formed a continuous town for nearly half of its circuit at the upper end. The people gathered in crowds at every landing-place, inviting us to land; and the young women and children ran along the bank abreast of us for a great distance. We noticed some girls who were beautifully formed—the graceful action of their limbs in running being unimpeded by any garments; though they appeared to appreciate the value of ornament, from the tasteful way in which their heads were dressed with large beads, &c. On reaching the upper end of Wuri Island we turned into the Ebonjeh Creek, which separates it from the main land on the left bank. This creek or branch is much narrower than the other. The banks were here also crowded with people, who ran along shouting and waving us to land. Passing rapidly down with the current, we soon rejoined the main stream.

The pilot having assured me that the town of Abo, at the source of the little affluent we had passed in going up,—the Yabiàng river,—was at a distance of only about 6 hours, and navigable for canoes, I determined on exploring it. We had the benefit of a little flood tide. The stream is much narrower than the other, being only about 120 yards wide; and at 6 miles it is divided by a low woody island. We were obliged to take the narrower channel, the other being blocked up by large trees thrown across to impede the navigation of hostile canoes. Our branch was so narrow that in some places oars would have touched the branches of the trees on either side, which however stretch out a very considerable distance from the bank. It was also full of snags, or trunks of trees, against one of which we struck violently, and I thought we had knocked a hole in the bottom of the boat, as the water was rushing in very fast, but it proved to be only the plug knocked out. The smell in this creek was very offensive from the quantity of decayed vegetable matter on the banks, which in some places were very thickly matted with creeping plants; these afford hiding places for canoes, which are drawn into a leafy cavern by a small aper-

ture among the tangle, like the opening to a nest. We were very glad to get to the main stream, above the island; but had not proceeded far, when a heavy shower of rain obliged us to take shelter in a hut at the foot of a hill. As there appeared to be little chance of its clearing up, I sent to reconnoitre a village called Kokki, which Glasgow said was at a short distance, and having ascertained that we could be accommodated, I resolved on passing the night there, with the view of proceeding to Abo in the morning, if possible.

The walk up the gentle hill to the village was through a beautiful and well-cultivated country, in which partial clearings had left magnificent clumps of trees. We found the chief in great distress at the loss of his wife, who died that morning while he was out shooting. I saw a very large antelope which he had brought in. In the intervals of his howling he drove a hard bargain with me for the hoofs and horns, which were all that I could prevail on him to part with.

The village was like the others, composed of neat huts on either side of a tolerably wide and straight street, which had also the merit of being clean swept. The cook-houses were all detached, and, being open at the side, we preferred sleeping in them, to the confinement of the close huts; and we should have probably enjoyed a good night's rest, after a substantial supper which was prepared for us, if it had not been for the incessant howling of the women, who held a wake over the dead body of the chief's wife.

The morning proved very cold and foggy, and as the river had become very narrow, with rank vegetation on its banks, from which a noxious vapour was rising, I would not venture any further, but returned towards the Wilberforce. The town Abo, which I wished to have reached, was said to be about 4 hours higher up, and to be situated near some rocks, over which the river Yabiàng falls about 50 feet, as well as I could understand from the imperfect description of the natives. At the distance of 4 hours overland, W.N.W., I was told there is a mountain, called Wah-paki, with a town of the same name.* A man overtook us in a canoe, with a message from the chief of that town, who wished us to pay him a visit; he said that he had started before "the first cock speak"—i. e. before daylight—which agrees in distance with the account given us at Kokki. The messenger pressed me to return, as he said his master would be much disappointed at the white man coming so near his town without visiting him. I sent

* This is doubtless a part of the Cameroons mountains, as I was told at Bimbia of one of a similar name at the back of Mongo-ma-Lobah.

him, however, a small present, which was the principal object of his solicitude, and the messenger went away quite contented.

We rapidly descended the river—passing through Jibareh Creek, which we had in vain attempted to go through in the steamer—and reached the Wilberforce at ten in the morning.

Although, on this little voyage, we did not reach a greater distance from the sea than 40 miles, the object I had in view was attained—viz., to ascertain the nature and magnitude of the river by reaching the main undivided trunk, which is only 8 miles above Bell's Town, and less than 20 from the sea. Indeed the real left bank of the river comes down as far as that settlement, which is on an elevation of 50 feet above the river. I hoped to have been able to make a good set of magnetic observations on this bank, but I found them full of discrepancies—accounted for by its geological structure, which is thus described by Mr. Roscher, geologist to the expedition:—

“The bank consists of a recent conglomerate, containing particles of quartz of the size of a walnut, small white fragments of mica, and masses of reddish sandstone, some of which measured four feet. The whole is combined by a light-brown clay. The stratification is horizontal, and the thickness of the beds varies from a few inches to several feet. I could not detect any organic remains in them. The fragments of sandstone, which constitute part of the conglomerate, are composed of particles of quartz combined by oxide of iron, or by the adhesion of their own particles. Sometimes the iron ore is combined chemically with clayey matter, forming compact masses.”

The influence of the iron on the magnetic needle would be stronger at the base of the cliff, where the sandstone is compact, and appears to contain a large quantity of the metal. Still I found it to be so great at the surface that it produced different results in the inclination, in observations taken only a few yards apart.

The opposite bank has a ledge of rocks, visible at low water, corresponding with the compact sandstone at the base of the cliffs, which would lead to the supposition that the original banks of the river reached as low as this on both sides. It is now, however, low and covered with mangrove-trees; as are all the islands within 25 miles of the sea. They appear indeed to be in process of forming a little delta, which may fill up the estuary, and thus regain from the encroachments of the sea what may have been submerged by some convulsion, caused by the volcanic agency of the neighbouring mountain range.

The fine estuary of the Cameroons is the common receptacle of several streams. It owes its name to the Portuguese, who

called the extreme point Cape Cameroons, from the vast quantities of small shrimps found there. This name has been extended to the principal river which falls into it, but the natives, as is usually the case, give it the name of the countries through which it flows. Thus at Bell's town it is called the Mādiba ma Dualla. Higher up it is Mādiba ma Wuri, &c.. Although it is a beautiful river, it is not to be compared with the Niger. Its average breadth above the mangroves is about 400 yards, as far as I reached. In the dry season, this portion of the river varies in depth from 2 to 20 feet, though we had rarely more than 8 feet; but when flooded, there would be water enough for vessels of any draught. From the accounts, however, of several intelligent natives, the navigation is obstructed by rocks at Banem, about 50 miles from the furthest point which I reached, or 90 miles from the sea; but beyond these rocks the river "goes on" for many days, according to my pilot, though he could give me no further account of it.

The Cameroons river has two tributaries on the right bank: one—the Yabiāng—which I explored a little way, and another about 25 miles above Wana Makembi's town. They are both said to have their source in, or to fall over, rocks about 50 feet high. There is also a small stream which falls into Ebonjeh creek, coming from Duka-bakin, about 4 hours up it.

It had been supposed, that besides the so-called Cameroons, a large river fell into this estuary called the Malimba; but all persons agreed in telling me that this is but a divergent creek from the Qua-Qua river, which comes from the eastward. My pilot Glasgow said, that this river has more mangroves, but that it is of less magnitude than the Wuri or Dualla. It is also obstructed by rocks at about the same distance from the sea. He said the king of all the Qua-Qua country resides at a place about 80 miles up the river, called Longassi.

Thus it would appear from all the accounts I received, that there is a range of hills extending from the Cameroons mountains to the eastward, or that there is a high table-land at about 100 miles from the sea, since the natives said of the four streams, that they all fall over rocks, about 50 feet high according to some. Circumstances prevented my exploring the Qua-Qua river; nor could I make much addition to Captain Vidal's survey of the estuary. I however surveyed the Dualla from Bell's town downwards, and connected it with that officer's work. In this operation I derived considerable advantage from two palm-oil vessels, which were dropping down at the same time, and one of which Mr. Lilley kindly ordered to be anchored in suitable positions. Besides the two rivers I have mentioned,—the Dualla and the Qua-Qua,—some creeks empty themselves into the estuary, viz., the Bòmano,

Mongo, and Bimbia, which are merely the drains of the high mountain range bounding the western side of the estuary.

With one exception, all the natives declared that there is no water communication from the estuary of the Cameroons, round the mountain, to the Rio del Rey, or Rumby river. Young Nako alone said, "If you slave for twenty days in a canoe, you can go round to Balondo on the Rumby river;" but, on confronting him with all the principal traders, he acknowledged that being a "little boy"—about twenty-five years old—he could not speak from experience, he had only heard it from others. These traders, chief men, all declared that the water stops at Balung, about 30 miles up the Bimbia river, where there are high hills, rocks, and springs of water. There are many elephants in the woods. The Mongo and Balung people go over the hills, by way of Ekombah and Ebonjeh, to Balondo, on the Rumby river; or, by taking another road from Ebonjeh, to Bamboko, on the western base of the mountain. The communication, however, is very difficult, on account of the hilly and woody nature of the country; and it must be lofty, as they said it was very cold. I was told that the Rumby river terminates at Balondo.

Although Mr. Lilley, who had nine years' experience, declared the Cameroons river to be healthy, some slight symptoms of fever, which appeared on board the *Wilberforce*, induced me to hasten to the bay of Amboises, where all soon recovered. We had there, also, the advantage of a good supply of fresh provisions, which could not be procured at Cameroons, nor at Fernando Po. The instructions from the Admiralty, and a favourable opinion which I entertained of the salubrity of this bay, led me to examine it with some care.

It is situated at the base of a lofty mountain, 13,000 feet, commonly called the Cameroons in our charts, but which Mr. John Grazilhier, who made a voyage to Old Kalabar in 1699,* says was called by the Portuguese the *Tierra Alta de Ambozes*. The islands lying in the bay, he says, were named by them *Ilhas Ambozes*, by the English *Amboises*, and by the French *Amboizes*. The only resemblance to this I found in the native name of the outer island, which they call *Ambàs* or *Damèh*.

The native name for the highest part of the mountain is *Mongo ma Lobah*, but at the back or inland it is called *Mokoli ma Pako*. The isolated peak near the bay, about 5000 feet high, is *Mongo m' Etindeh*. Although at a distance this noble mountain appears to rise by a continuous slope from the sea, on a closer view it is found to consist of a succession of hills with intervening valleys of

* Astley's *Voyages*, vol. iii. p. 119.

the richest soil, covered to within a third of the summit by beautiful forest-trees, which are also seen fringing the ravines still nearer to the summit. The remainder is clothed with grass, which becomes more scanty—as the colour which approaches the reddish brown of volcanic ashes near the cone sufficiently indicates. The volcanic origin of the whole of this district is strongly marked by the scoriæ and numerous streams of lava which have reached the sea. From the present condition of its surface, it must have been for ages in a state of repose; though there is reason to think it sometimes betrays its latent fires. Mr. Lilley assured me that he had seen flame near the summit. This might have been accounted for by the practice of the natives, who set fire to the grass in the dry season for the purpose of catching wild animals, which they call “bush-meat;” but several of the principal natives of Bimbia declared, that about three years previous to my visit, that is, about the year 1838, “fire came out of the ground;” they said, “God made it,” in contradistinction from that caused by the burning of the grass. “They all saw it, and at Mongo they felt the earth shake like a steamboat.” “The people there feared it would kill them all.” This, coupled with the name of the mountain,—Mongo ma Lobah, or God’s mountain,—might be a fair reason for supposing this to be the chariot of the gods of Hanno, the Carthaginian. He says, “We discovered at night a country full of fire. In the middle was a lofty fire, larger than the rest, which seemed to touch the stars. When day came we discovered it to be a large hill, called the Chariot of the Gods.”

To judge by the grey curling smoke issuing from many parts of the woods for a great distance up the mountain, it must have a large population. Along the sea-shore there are many villages, some of which I visited; and, though the natives were described by Brazilhier as “the worst blacks of all Guinea,” I found them very civil. In his time they had a little trade in slaves, chiefly with the Dutch. They now have intercourse only with the Bimbia people, whom they supply in a great measure with plantains.

The base of the mountain to the westward of Mongo m’ Etindeh is called Bamboko, that part to the southward Bakwileh, and behind Bimbia, at the eastern part of the mountain, it is called Batongo.

At Bimbia there are numerous villages built on a beautiful amphitheatre of rocky ground; the inlet is sheltered by a small island, and would be an excellent anchorage for ships trading in palm-oil, but it is very hot, and the land-winds blow over the swamps of the estuary. The inhabitants are actively engaged in collecting palm-oil, of which they told me they had a large quantity, and were anxiously looking for some white traders to take it

off their hands. They, as well as the natives of the islands in the bay, are of the Dualla nation, while those of the base of the mountain are of a different race, and are called by their more civilized neighbours "bushmen."

There are in the bay of Amboises three small islands, the size and capabilities of which are in inverse ratio to their population. The largest—Mondoleh—only half a mile long, situated at the S.E. part of the bay, is high and rocky, but with a level surface of the richest soil imaginable, of decomposed basalt, and the steep sides are clothed with beautiful wood. There are at present only ten men with their wives and families on it, though, if well cultivated, it would afford subsistence for probably five times as many. There are three or four springs of water half way up the side of the island, which, though scanty, are said to be always flowing. The landing is bad, but might be improved.

The outer island, Damèh, or Ambàs, is smaller, and nearly barren: the rocky slopes and summits only, are clothed with a little brushwood and grass. It is, in fact, a narrow ridge of rock, elevated at the outer extremity; but although nature has here provided no means of subsistence, about 300 or 400 people have made it their home. They exchange the abundant produce of the sea, with the natives of the mainland, for plantains and yams. They have also a good stock of goats and pigs, which feed on the precipitous sides of the island. The only place at which boats can land is difficult, on account of the rugged rocks and incessant swell. With very little trouble, however, a good pier might be made. There is only one scanty spring, which indeed was dry when I saw it—unless I was misled: the inhabitants are therefore obliged to catch rain-water, and in the dry season they must get supplies from the mainland.

The island Bobia, called also the Pirate Isle, from the *supposed* predatory disposition of the natives, is more barren even than Damèh. It is a mere wreck of a larger island, as the numerous isolated fragments, perforated by the sea, and lying in its vicinity, bear witness of its having been formerly much more extensive.

It is probable that it once joined the adjacent perpendicular cliff on the mainland, as the structure is similar, and between them there is but a narrow and shallow channel. The promontory may even have extended to Damèh, with which it is in a line. The progress of destruction is still going on, as enormous fragments of rock are lying at the N. end of the island, which I believe to have fallen since my visit in 1833. Although this is much smaller than the other two islands it is swarming with people, almost every available spot on its rugged surface being occupied by a hut. It is perpendicular on all sides, and the only access to the summit is by clambering up what appears to be the

projection of a basaltic dike—a fearful path, passable for only one at a time, and which might be defended by a child. The inhabitants probably owe to their impregnable position the bad character they have among their neighbours. They are a ferocious looking though a shy race, but I never heard of any well authenticated charge of piracy against them. More correctly speaking, their secure position has probably engendered a spirit of independence, and a determination to resist oppression. The chief of Bimbia complained to me that they would not acknowledge his authority, nor comply with demands which I found were not so just as he alleged. These islanders are the principal fishermen of the bay, which in fine weather they cover with their light canoes. This enables them to obtain by barter from the mainland—with which they are in constant communication—the scanty clothing they require, and supplies of plantains, yams, &c.

They were at first very much alarmed at our appearance, believing that we were come to put in execution the threats of King William of Bimbia; but we soon became on better terms, and I landed several times, and climbed up to their curious village. At the summit of the path the island ridge is not, I think, 10 feet across.

The anchorage is excellent in all parts of the bay, as to holding ground and depth; and although it is a lee shore, and there is an incessant swell, I believe it never blows home here so as to endanger ships, and the landing is not so bad as at Ascension. The prevalent wind is S.W., to which the bay is quite open; and the worst months are, I believe, July and August, but there is shelter behind the island Mòndoleh. Wood, vegetables, and live stock, may be had in abundance: the latter at a fourth of the price demanded at Fernando Po. Excellent water can also be had near Kieh, but only at low tide, as the water gushes out at the foot of a rock. By excavating, however, above high-water mark, a very convenient watering-place might be made. The disadvantage of being a lee shore is amply compensated by the purity of the sea breeze, which blows across the Atlantic. The adjacent mainland, too, is nearly devoid of mangroves and swamps; and as the land wind passes over the lofty mountain it is rendered cool and refreshing. Indeed, from the peculiarity of its situation, and from local circumstances, I think that the Bay of Amboises will be found to be the most healthy position on the coast of Africa. Although my visits were during part of the rainy season, we seldom had more than a shower or a torqado about once in twenty-four hours. The rest of the day the weather was very beautiful, and we were some days without rain.